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AUTHOR	D'Amico, Carol
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ABSTRACT

The U.S. Department of Education's (DOE's) request from Congress for vocational and adult education funding for fiscal year 2004 was based on the department's belief that current and future U.S. workers must be challenged to master academic knowledge and practical skills at levels that are at least comparable to those mastered by workers in other advanced or industrialized countries. One billion dollars was requested to support the Bush Administration's proposed secondary and technical education program. The requested funds were to be targeted toward helping states and communities improve student outcomes, particularly academic achievement, and ensuring that students are taught the academic knowledge and practical skills needed for successful transitions from high school to college and from college to the workforce. The request for secondary and technical education did not include requests for most current vocational education programs, including occupational and employment information, tech prep state grants, and tech prep demonstration. DOE requested $591 million for adult education, including $584.3 million for formula grants to states and $6.7 million for the National Institute for Literacy. This request did not include a request for funds for state grants for incarcerated youth offenders or literacy programs for prisoners. (MN)

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Statement by Carol D'Amico, Assistant Secretary for Vocational and Adult Education, on the Fiscal Year 2004 Request for Vocational and Adult Education Programs

FOR RELEASE: March 19, 2003

Speaker frequently deviates from prepared text

Contact: Dan Langan (202)401-1576

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to appear before you to discuss the programs and fiscal resources administered in the Office of Vocational and Adult Education. The 2004 budget outlines the fundamental changes we believe are necessary to ensure that these resources are used effectively to provide young people and adults the educational foundation they need to succeed in postsecondary education and the workforce.

The President's fiscal year 2004 budget request, totaling approximately $1.6 billion, supports the Administration's reauthorization strategy to reshape the Federal investment in secondary and technical education and adult basic and literacy education to build on the key principles of the No Child Left Behind Act and to meet the demands of the 21st century economy. This strategy will help States and communities strengthen the academic performance and postsecondary and workforce preparation of high school students, support high-quality technical education in community and technical colleges, and provide more effective, research-based reading, math, and English literacy instruction to adults.

Our vision of secondary, technical, and adult education begins with this inescapable truth: current and future American workers must be challenged to master academic knowledge and practical skills at levels that are at least comparable to those mastered by workers in other advanced or industrialized countries. The economic future for those who do not attain this level of mastery will be bleak. The present global economy is neither compassionate nor forgiving. American workers are competing in a global marketplace, and they must be equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in an economy that has undergone, and will continue to undergo, profound transformations. This economy is increasingly knowledge-based, information- oriented.

We must also ensure that every student—every single student—is so well grounded, so well prepared, and so proficient in core skills, that he or she can adapt and adjust as quickly as the economy changes, and freely choose his or her own place in the world of work. An education that prepares individuals for a job but that does not provide the training and foundation to move up or move on is not an education worth the Federal investment. Our reauthorization strategy is driven by this vision of individual empowerment and choice.

Secondary and Technical Education

The fiscal year 2004 request includes $1 billion to support the Administration's proposed Secondary and Technical Education program, which would replace the current vocational education program. With our proposal, we seek to discard dated ideas about the skills needed to secure quality jobs in our economy, and to shatter the low expectations that deny too many students access to the academic and technical courses needed to obtain these skills.

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In past decades, Americans with lower-level academic skills could fare relatively well in the economy if they possessed a solid work ethic and some training. Jobs requiring low- and medium-level skills were plentiful and many paid sufficient wages to support a family. That is no longer the case. Growth in the number of these lower-skilled positions is declining, and the wages they offer are in a free-fall. Instead, many of the fastest-growing jobs in our economy require some form of postsecondary education. Workforce success now means equipping high school graduates with higher-level academic skills and preparing them for postsecondary education. Not every student will need or want to earn a baccalaureate degree, not every student will want to enter an associate degree or certificate program immediately after high school, but, ultimately, most will need some education or training beyond high school to land a good job that pays family-supporting wages.

Even those jobs that do not require postsecondary education demand a higher level of academic skills than many of us may realize. Law enforcement is a good example. High school career academies organized around a law enforcement theme have become increasingly popular, particularly in urban areas. Students may find the classes on police procedures exciting, but it is academic skills, not technical expertise, that will determine whether they wear a badge. Most urban and suburban jurisdictions require applicants for law enforcement jobs to pass a basic skills exam, and a disturbing number of aspiring police officers fail to clear this hurdle. The Hartford, Connecticut and Oxnard, California police departments, for example, have reported that two-thirds of their police academy applicants fail their 10th grade level basic skills exams. Academic tests of this kind are common. According to the American Management Association, 41 percent of employers require applicants for entry-level jobs to pass a basic skills exam. About one third of all test-takers fail.

While the importance of high level academic skills and postsecondary education to individual success in the job market has become evident, too many students lack access to college preparatory academics and technical coursework that leads to postsecondary education. Students are often sorted and routed through school according to their perceived abilities. Too frequently, vocational education is offered not as a supplement to a quality academic education, but as a less demanding alternative—inducing low achieving and at-risk students to stay in school, but offering a narrow set of job skills in lieu of a rigorous academic foundation. High school becomes a rough shove into poverty, rather than a pathway to self-sufficiency.

The current vocational education statute only tentatively addresses the imperatives that must drive our efforts to prepare young people for the future. Clearer direction is needed. Providing all students with the same high level of academic and technical preparation is not merely a "best practice" we should encourage. It is the only practice we should fund.

The Administration's reauthorization proposal would target Federal resources on helping States and communities to improve student outcomes, particularly academic achievement, and ensure that students are taught the academic knowledge and practical skills needed to make successful transitions from high school to college and from college to the workforce. States would use their Federal formula allocations to make grants to local educational agencies and community and technical colleges to develop or implement academic/technical education programs that show promise or are effective in improving students' academic and technical skills, increasing degree attainment, reducing the need for remedial courses at the postsecondary level, and improving employment outcomes.

For example, students enrolled in the Meridian Charter High School in Meridian, Idaho complete a rigorous college prep academic curriculum and a technical education program of study in information technology, electronics, or graphic design. During their junior year, all students take the COMPASS college entrance exam at Boise State University. Students with college-ready math and reading skills may enroll in dual credit

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courses related to their area of concentration. Students who are unsuccessful on the exam have additional time to bring their math and reading skills up to college level before they graduate. Meridian is one of Idaho's top academic performers, with its students scoring above State and district averages in math, reading, and writing on Idaho's academic assessments.

The proposed program also would support and extend the achievement and accountability goals of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) by helping States and communities implement high school improvement strategies that include creating new choices for students and parents, strengthening collaboration between secondary and postsecondary education to improve student readiness to do college work, and providing tutoring and additional academic support to students who enter high school with reading and math skills that are significantly below grade level. To help facilitate coordination with ESEA Title I and enhance flexibility in how Federal funds are used, States also would have the option to transfer funds to support education-related activities under the ESEA Title I, Part A program.

Mr. Chairman, you and Governor Taft have been leaders in efforts to improve Ohio's high schools. As you know, the State of Ohio has rated the Cleveland school system an "academic emergency." A little more than one-third of entering high students exit with a diploma. Less than one-third of these high school graduates go on to college. Only about one- third of these students return to college after the freshman year.

Cleveland is now struggling to turn this around. It is restructuring its high schools using the research-based Talent Development model developed with funding from the Department's Institute of Education Sciences, increasing instructional time in core academics during the 9th and 10th grades. Students have more choices; new high schools have been created on the campuses of Cuyahoga Community College and Cleveland State University. The superintendent recently eliminated three-quarters of the high school academic and technical courses because they failed to meet State academic standards and did not prepare students for success in college and the workforce. Painfully rudimentary academic courses like business math, consumer math, and life skills math are no longer offered. Now all students must complete a college prep academic core. Vocational courses like shoe repair and shorthand have been replaced by technical education programs, such as the Ford Academy of Manufacturing Sciences, that include rigorous academics and connections to postsecondary education. High schools in which these and other reforms were introduced the earliest are showing promise, and signs of improvement.

Mr. Chairman, these are the kinds of bold actions we want to promote and support. Rather than continue to subsidize classes in shoe repair and instruction in basic arithmetic, we want to invest in preparing young people for the future. Maintaining or "tweaking" the status quo cheats us, and it cheats our children.

The President's 2004 budget does not request funds for most current vocational education programs, including Occupational and Employment Information, Tech-Prep State Grants, and the Tech-Prep Demonstration. These programs duplicate activities that can be achieved in the larger State grant program and there is little or no evidence that the programs are leading to better student outcomes. Also, funding for the Tribally Controlled Postsecondary Vocational and Technical Institutions program is requested in the Higher Education Account because of the program's similarity to other institutional development programs supported under the Higher Education Act. Funding for national programs will be addressed in the reauthorization as a set-aside from formula grants.

Adult Basic and Literacy Education

To promote literacy, the fiscal year 2003 request includes $591 million for adult education, including $584.3 million for formula grants to States and $6.7 million for the National Institute for Literacy.

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The No Child Left Behind Act and our secondary and technical education proposal will ensure that, over time, American students graduate high school with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in postsecondary education and the workforce. But today, many adults who have already been left behind are looking for a second chance. They departed school before graduating, graduated lacking basic skills, or are recent immigrants with limited English literacy skills. Economic opportunities for these adults are limited, and shrinking. The national assessment of adult literacy in the early 1990s found that unemployment rates among the least literate adults in the workforce were four to seven times higher than those at the highest literacy level. Among the employed, there was a 40 percent earnings gap between the least and most literate. This gap has likely widened in the last decade.

The Federal investment in closing this education and earnings gap among adults is substantial. Federal funding for the adult education program increased $104 million, or 21 percent, between FY 2000 and FY 2002. Yet we are not serving more students with these funds, nor are we are pursuing and achieving more aggressive performance goals. The Administration's reauthorization proposal seeks to ensure that the Federal investment leads to better results for eligible adults and that grantees are held accountable for achieving those results.

Proposed amendments to the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act would expand choices and opportunities for adults to learn and help States to diversify the array of local providers and build the capacity of community-based organizations, including faith-based organizations, to provide adult education. Amendments would promote greater participation of employers and more workplace literacy programs, expanded use of technology to make education more accessible, and State incentives to strengthen coordination among education and employment programs that serve low-literate adults to ensure that these resources are spent effectively and generate the greatest returns.

Our reauthorization proposal seeks to improve the performance of the adult education enterprise by insisting on greater accountability for results. The proposal would continue to offer incentives for success to States and local programs, but also create more explicit consequences for failure to perform, including technical assistance and sanctions. Just as accountability under No Child Left Behind relies on clear academic standards and assessing students' proficiency against those standards, so are standards and assessments needed to improve accountability in adult education. We propose that States establish rigorous content standards and standardized assessments in language arts, mathematics, and English fluency. Many States are already working to this end. New York, for example, has adapted its K-12 standards for adult education and uses a peer-review process to ensure that instructional materials are aligned with those standards.

Research-based practice is another tool for improving the quality and productivity of adult education. Millions of dollars support research on adult learning, and must continue to do so. With national activity funds, for example, we are supporting rigorous research through the Institute of Education Sciences on the most effective methods for teaching reading skills to low- literate adolescents and adults. From this and other scientifically based research, we hope to identify effective instructional practices. States, in turn, will be able to support professional development and other strategies to ensure that this knowledge is shared with instructors and used in their classrooms.

For fiscal year 2004, no funds are requested under the current, separate National Leadership Activities authority. The reauthorization strategy will address national activities, including technical assistance and evaluation, as part of the proposed State Grants program. Funds reserved for these activities support, among other things, continued data gathering so that we can better understand the scope of adult literacy among the U.S. population.

First, we need to make sure that current services are of the highest possible quality—reflecting the best-known research about adult learning and having a clear focus with specific objectives for each adult education class that is offered. This requires clear expectations, good curriculum and assessments, well-trained teachers, and an accountability system to measure and report on student and program success.

Second, we need to make a broader array of services available to adult learners who are currently not accessing learning. That is why we are developing national activities around the role of workplace education, community and faith-based organizations as providers of rigorous training on research-based practices to volunteer tutors, and the use of libraries and technology- enabled learning to supplement the role of a well-trained adult education teacher. In cooperation with States and the private sector, we are looking for ways to connect multiple systems and resources together in a way that will improve program effectiveness and serve more adults.The request also includes $6.7 million for the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), with the expectation that new authorizing legislation will continue the program. NIFL fosters innovation and collaboration in order to build and strengthen national, regional, and State literacy infrastructures, and promotes consensus in the field on strategies to increase the resources for, access to, and quality of literacy services.

The 2004 budget continues the policy of requesting no funding for State Grants for Incarcerated Youth Offenders and Literacy Programs for Prisoners. This request is consistent with the Administration's effort to eliminate small programs that have only indirect or limited effect on improving student outcomes.

Conclusion

Technology, changing demographics and global economic competition are combining in unprecedented ways to change work and redefine the American workplace. Unlike jobs a half- century ago, today most positions that pay family-supporting wages and offer opportunities for advancement demand strong academic and technical skills, technological proficiency, and some education beyond high school. Our prosperity and competitive edge hinge on our ability to prepare every American for the future.

Building on the key principles of the No Child Left Behind Act, the Administration's reauthorization strategy for adult and vocational education will support State and local efforts to master this challenge. Every young person, every adult, must have the educational foundation needed to succeed in the workforce and to chart his or her own destiny.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared remarks. I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have.

This page last modified—March 19, 2003 (mjj).

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